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PROGRAM Good Morning, America

STATION WJLA TV
ABC Network

DATE August 27, 1981 7:00 AM

CITY Washington, D. C.

SUBJECT An Interview with Luke Thompson

HUGH DOWNS: Four years ago, Green Beret Master Sergeant Luke Thompson put together a special team of experts. And their mission was to train terrorists in Libya. At the same time, Luke Thompson thought that he was working for the CIA. But later after he returned to the United States, he was told that his mission was not sponsored by the CIA. In fact, the man who masterminded the operation was a former CIA agent and is now being sought on charges of illegally exporting explosives to Libya.

This story surfaced for the first time yesterday in the New York Times. And Green Beret leader Luke Thompson is with us now to talk about what happened. At his request, our camera is showing him in silhouette. He's in the studios of our ABC affiliate in Honolulu, Hawaii, KITV-TV. And Steve Bell joins us from Washington.

Good morning, Mr. Thompson.

LUKE THOMPSON: Good morning.

DOWNS: Four years ago you were a Green Beret stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. And at the time, who recruited you for this mission, and what were you told about it?

THOMPSON: A man who identified himself as Mr. Loomis, Pat Loomis, approached me by telephone and asked me if I could put together a team with the expertise that's normally found in the Special Forces' A detachment and be prepared to move pretty fast.

DOWNS: Now you reported this conversation to counter-

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intelligence people at Fort Bragg....

THOMPSON: Yes, sir. Yes, I did.

DOWNS: What was their reaction to this? What did they tell you?

THOMPSON: Well, they started an investigation and told me to continue and cooperate and keep them informed in the interim.

DOWNS: And your superiors at Fort Bragg gave you a leave of absence. And what happened then?

THOMPSON: Well, I proceeded to Libya. I proceeded to Washington, and I was told that I was going to Canada to negotiate a contract. And I got to Washington, and the meeting place was changed to London. And the day that we left, finally left for Libya, the meeting place was changed to Zurich. And I was instructed to keep my people in the international zone of the airport, not to leave it, and meet with a man there that was described to me, and under no circumstances leave the international zone.

STEVE BELL: Mr. Thompson, you recruited the other members of your group?

THOMPSON: Four others.

BELL: Yeah. And they were former Green Berets that you knew personally. Is that how you went about it?

THOMPSON: Yes. Yes, they were.

BELL: Uh-huh. All right. When you finally got to that meeting in Europe, what were you told that you were going to be doing in Libya? How was your mission described to you?

THOMPSON: I was looking for clarification. I didn't have any idea of what the mission was at that point. And I asked the gentleman who was I working for, you know, what am I doing. And he said "You're working for me." And I said "Well, what do you want me to do?" He said "We want you people to go to Libya and ingratiate yourself with those ignorant bastards and make yourselves indispensable."

BELL: How did you interpret that?

THOMPSON: Well, when I asked what he meant, he said, well, do anything that they ask you to that don't violate your conscience or security.

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BELL: And did you have the sense then that you were being asked to spy on them, or what?

THOMPSON: Well, there're several factors that led me to believe that it was an above-board operation. I'd told this gentleman at that point that I had discussed all of the things that we'd talked about with the counterintelligence people. And he was not -- he was not distressed at all. He said "No, there's no difficulty, no problem." He said "We'll take care of it."

So from the start to finish, it smacked of an official operation.

BELL: Yet you left Libya after 40 days. What made you decide to leave?

THOMPSON: Some of the -- some of the activities that I'd seen around me of people involved in -- understand, we were asked to train commandos, not terrorists. That takes on several connotations in that part of the world. But some of the things that I'd seen there, like the demolitions labs and the electronic eavesdropping, and so forth, and the people we were working with, it could no way have been an agency operation at that point. And I was in an official capacity, the only one in an official capacity, in an unfriendly country. And I had to exfiltrate [sic], because if I'd have been blown, there's only one recourse that they could have done. I would have been tried as a spy.

DOWNS: Now the operation continued after you left. Do you know -- how long did it go on after that?

THOMPSON: Well, it went on for some time. I can't say when it stopped, if it stopped.

DOWNS: You've had death threats, I understand. You've reported that.

THOMPSON: Yes.

DOWNS: Do you know who is threatening you?

THOMPSON: I feel like it, yes.

DOWNS: You feel that you know who's threatening you?

THOMPSON: Yes.

DOWNS: Can you say?

THOMPSON: No.

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DOWNS: No.

BELL: Mr. Thompson, how did U. S. officials react when you came back from Libya and expressed your concerns about what you were being asked to do?

THOMPSON: It reminded me of the Keystone Cops. I was told initially, prior to going to Libya, by the counterintelligence people that they had investigated this thing to the top, and they were directed by their higher[-ups] to not pursue it any further, and it was completely legal and above board, and I could pursue it as I desired.

BELL: And yet when you got back, what was their reaction when you told them you were training terrorists?

THOMPSON: Well, I didn't tell them I was training terrorists. I told them we were training commandos. That's the word, see, that people seem to use, you know. I told them exactly what I was told. You can reach whatever conclusion you want from that.

BELL: They didn't seem....

THOMPSON: However....

BELL: Excuse me.

THOMPSON: ...they -- at that point, they said there seemed to be some difficulty somewhere, and they instructed me to make full disclosure to the Justice Department.

BELL: Which you did.

THOMPSON: Yes.

BELL: Now the CIA said yesterday that some of its employees did, in fact, sponsor this operation, but without official sanction, and that those employees were later punished. You assume they were fired. What have they told you about it?

THOMPSON: They have told me nothing about it.

BELL: When you inquired, what was their response?

THOMPSON: When I inquired, I inquired prior to going before the secret grand jury. I still at that point didn't really believe. I was like Pavlov's dog; you might react to each stimulus. And one minute it was an agency operation; the next minute it wasn't. And I had to get some guidance. And I went to the agency headquarters in Virginia to get some guidance before I testified. And they denied any activity whatsoever.

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DOWNS: The man who employed you, as I understand it, has been indicted for sending explosives illegally to Libya.

THOMPSON: Yes, he was. I understand that that's the case.

BELL: Mr. Thompson, if you had to just summarize the whole thing from your point of view, how do you feel about it now? What feelings are you left with about your government, the whole operation?

THOMPSON:- Well, I thought it was a pretty straightforward thing. It looked like that we were in a tremendous position to further our intelligence cause by the fact that we were accepted by Libyan intelligence. We had carte blanche, and we were treated like kings in Libya. I figured that this -- you know, this was a perfect opportunity. And I figured that was the ultimate aim, you know, to make ourselves available to further our intelligence gathering facility there.

DOWNS: Thank you, Mr. Thompson, for being our guest this morning. Our time is up.

THOMPSON: Thank you very much.

DOWNS: Mr. Thompson has appeared in silhouette at his request. He has had threats.